

impact

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Lemhi County Cattlemen's Winter School — successful since 1970

AT A GLANCE

Cattlemen's Winter School began in 1970. Surveys show cattlemen have gained knowledge and skills over the years.

The Situation

Lemhi County is geographically challenged, being two hours from any major city. The geographic challenge also limits the opportunity to attend educational events to gain new skills and knowledge. Cattlemen also have the challenge of tending and feeding cattle every day.

In 1970 Bob Loucks, University of Idaho Extension county agent, held the first Cattlemen's Winter School. Winter school began on the first Tuesday night in January after New Year's and continued for six weeks on Tuesday nights. Topics changed from week to week with Bob presenting most of the workshops. Winter school began at 7 p.m. and was held at the Elks Lodge.

Our Response

The need for Lemhi County cattlemen to have up-to-date, current, research-based information was identified in 1970. January was identified as the ideal time for educational workshops as it was after the holidays and before calving season. UI Extension partnered with the Lemhi County Cattle and Horse Growers Association to determine topics, speakers and host Winter School. Speakers have included UI Extension faculty and specialists, allied industry and local partners.



Cattlemen learn about meat processing and what consumers want at winter school. Photo by Shannon Williams.

Winter school has always included a noxious weed/pest management night so that participants may receive pesticide recertification credits to maintain their license. Winter school has also dedicated a night every three years to beef quality assurance (BQA) so participants can maintain their BQA certifications. Participation in winter school is principally local cattlemen but has also included small acreage landowners and agency personnel. Most participants are residents of Lemhi County but since offering it virtually, that audience has expanded.

In January 2000, Shannon Williams became the UI Extension educator in Lemhi County. Cattlemen's Winter School had already been planned and was going. She attended them as was one of two females in a

“sea” of black cowboy hats. As she visited with the cattlemen, she learned they felt strongly about winter school and their desire to increase their knowledge and skills.

Over the years, winter school has changed some, but the basics have remained the same, contributing to its longevity and success. It is still held on Tuesday evenings, starting in January at 7 p.m. at the Elks Lodge, and relevant topics continue to be presented each week.

Changes in the winter school have included reducing the school to five weeks as most cattlemen begin calving around Feb. 1. Cattlemen are asked to vote on a list of potential topics and speakers at their annual meeting in November. Those topics receiving the most votes are the topics presented that year. Speakers are utilized from UI Extension faculty and specialists, industry representatives and local agencies. Participation averages 28 each week and 3-5% of the participants are female. Advertising for winter school is done by mailing a letter and flyer to everyone who has attended in the past few years. It also includes weekly emails, Facebook posts and text message reminders.

At the 2023 Cattlemen’s Winter School, participants were asked to complete a survey to gain information about how long they have been attending, why they attended and what knowledge and skills they have gained. Eight percent of those completing the survey have attended for over 31 years. The table below shows the number of years cattlemen have been attending.

Years cattlemen have been attending	Percent
1 to 5 years	29%
6 to 10 years	21%
11 to 20 years	32%
31 years	8%

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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The average number of nights attending was 2.8. Sixty-five percent attend in person, and 31% have attended in-person and virtually. The virtual option was initiated in 2020 and has continued since then.

When asked why they attended, the number one answer was to gain knowledge and skills, and 77% said they had achieved this. The second reason for attending was to visit with other cattlemen. Third was to obtain beef quality assurance certification followed by obtaining pesticide recertification credits.

Program Outcomes

Forty-eight people completed the Cattlemen’s Winter School survey. The knowledge and skills section had five areas. They were management, nutrition, range and pasture, pesticide and noxious weeds, and financial management. Each of these categories had topics that had been covered at previous winter schools. Participants were asked to circle all the areas where they had gained knowledge and skills. In the management category, beef quality assurance was the top topic with 65%; treatment protocol (59%); calving management (51%); and record keeping (51%). Cow nutrition (74%) was the top area for the nutrition category followed by importance of mineral (68%); nutritional requirements of heifers (42%); and supplementation (39%). Range and pasture area included poisonous plants (47%); soil testing (42%); electric fence technology (42%). Weed identification topped the noxious weed/pest management section with (65%); control options (53%); biological control (50%); new invaders (50%); and invasive grasses (50%). Finance topics included market outlook (67%); managing production cost (42%); tax planning (36%); financial records (36%).

The Future

Cattlemen’s Winter School will continue Tuesday nights in January at 7 p.m. each year with cattlemen providing input for topics and speakers.